

Vermont Commission on Women

Meeting Minutes

March 13, 2013

4th Floor Conference Room, Pavilion Office Building, Montpelier, VT

Commissioners present:

Marcia Merrill, Chair; Gretchen Bailey,
Eileen Boland, Carol Buchdahl, Charlotte Dennett,
Laine Dunham, Ruth Finn, Cathy Frey,
Susie Hudson, Dr. Felicia Kornbluh,
Marion Milne, and Shambulia Gadsden-Sams.

Commissioners absent:

Jennie Gartner, Danielle Martel.

Advisors present: Kim Bina representing Vermont Federation of Business and Professional Women, and
Ilisa Stalberg representing the Vermont Department of Health.

Guests: Elsa Bosma, childcare provider; Ellen Durette, childcare provider; Belinda Snow-Gifford,
childcare provider; Anna Gephardt, childcare union organizer; Chris Hastedt (via phone) from Maine
Equal Justice; Abigail Kiablick from Senator Sanders' Office; Cheryl Reed, Reach Up team leader; Cathy
Stech, childcare provider; and Angela Timpone, American Federation of Teachers.

Staff: Cary Brown, Janet Bullard, and Lilly Talbert.

Presiding: Marcia Merrill

Recording: Janet Bullard

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m.

1. Welcome/Introductions/photo orientation

Marcia welcomed everyone. Introductions were done. Lilly introduced former Commissioner Mary Claire Carroll and explained that Mary Claire would be taking Commissioner photos during the meeting. Marcia announced that Peg Martin has resigned from the Commission. Janet announced that she would be retiring from the Commission on June 30th of this year after 26 years with the Commission and 31 years with the State.

2. Minutes

MOTION made by Marion Milne and seconded by Laine Dunham:

**To approve the minutes as submitted with the correction of one spelling error
on Page 3, 2nd paragraph, 3rd sentence – change 'hosing' to housing.**

MOTION APPROVED

3. Governor's proposal for limits on Reach Up benefits

Chris Hastedt from Maine Equal Justice stated that they have been working with Maine Women's Lobby and have done studies on ANFC (Aid to Needy Families with Children) and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) with the goal of helping policymakers make educated decisions. In 2011 the Maine legislature established a 60-month lifetime limit on the length of time that poor families with children could receive help from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program. The time limit was implemented as of June 2012. During the next four and one-half months more than 1,500 families, including an estimated 2,700 children, lost this assistance.

Sandra Butler, a professor of Social Work at the University of Maine with over twenty years of experience in research related to low-income Maine families, conducted a study of the impact of this time limit on the first wave of families to lose their TANF assistance. This work, which included both a survey and personal interviews with a sample of affected families, was commissioned by Maine Equal Justice Partners.

The study found that families losing assistance face multiple barriers to work and experience severe hardships as a result of losing TANF assistance due to time limits. Further, the findings indicate a failure by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to properly implement key statutory protections in a fair and uniform manner. This survey also raises important questions about the adequacy of services provided to families, particularly those with disabilities, through the ASPIRE program while they are receiving TANF.

Cheryl Reed, Reach Up team leader with the Agency of Human Services in Central Vermont, reported that she supervises case managers who work directly with clients, although she occasionally has a caseload as well because there aren't enough case managers for the caseload they have. Transportation and child care is a huge issue in Central Vermont.

Clients are assigned a case manager and an assessment is done, looking at strengths and barriers. A lot of folk have undiagnosed learning disabilities. Case managers ask clients to go through a testing process to help figure out what is going on with them in order to be able to best serve them. Lots of clients have substance abuse issues, either treatment hasn't been successful or they relapse. There are work participation rates that require clients to work between 20 and 40 hours of work in order for the State to be in compliance with Federal regulations. Case managers work with clients to remove barriers so their clients can meet the work requirements.

Felicia Kornbluh gave a brief background history on the start of public assistance programs.

MOTION made by Carol Buchdahl and seconded by Charlotte Dennett:

That the Commission take a position opposing the proposed time limits for Reach Up, in consideration of the following:

- The majority of recipients of Reach Up are women and they have children who will be disproportionately impacted
 - Many of those who are on Reach Up face multiple challenges, such as domestic violence, divorce, disabilities, mental health issues, lack of transportation and education
 - We should not balance the budget on the backs of those who can least afford it
- Instruct Lilly and Cary to write a one-page letter to this effect and send it to AHS Secretary Racine, the Governor and appropriate Legislators.

MOTION APPROVED

4. Child Care Providers Collective Bargaining

Angela Timpone from the American Federation of Teachers reported that S.52, the child care providers collective bargaining bill, was voted down by the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, & General Affairs yesterday. She answered questions about the bill and provided some additional background information on the issue.

Cathy Stech, a child care provider, spoke to the Commission. She has worked in a childcare center and now runs her own home-based childcare program, would like to have a union, has tried over her career to interface with the state and has had difficulty doing so.

Ellen Durette, a child care provider, spoke to the Commission. She runs a childcare program and has for many years and likes being her own boss. She said that a union will not allow her to change her rates, control her working conditions, pay for her own healthcare and arrange her own professional development. She feels that there is nothing that a union can do for her childcare business.

Elsa Bosma, a child care provider, spoke to the Commission. She runs a childcare in Shelburne and is opposed to the bill as are many other childcare providers that she knows of. She informed everyone that she has information on the other states that have passed union legislation and would share that information with Cary. If a union is established, she said she would have to pass her union dues or agency fee on to the parents of the children in her childcare.

Belinda Snow-Gifford spoke to the Commission. She is a home-care provider and supports the childcare union bill because she sees it as a good way to interact with other childcare providers in order to better serve children and parents.

Commissioners discussed the comments made by the various guests. This bill will be brought up at another Commission meeting.

5. Paid Sick Days discussion

Cary gave an update on the paid sick days legislation. She informed everyone that there was a press conference on H.208 yesterday. The legislation is in the House General Affairs Committee.

6. Announcements/Updates

H.99, the Equal Pay bill, is in the House Judiciary Committee and a hearing is set for tomorrow and a vote is scheduled for Friday. The bill was amended by the House General, Housing, & Military Affairs Committee. Cary emailed the link with the amended bill out to everyone.

Amicus Brief hearing on Tuesday, March 19th at 9:30 a.m. in Federal Court in Burlington.

Cary distributed a copy of a spreadsheet she developed in order to follow legislation relevant to the Commission's work.

March 26th is the Women's History Month "Women in Journalism" event, from 12:00noon – 1:30 p.m., in the Snelling Room of the Vermont Historical Society (1st floor of the Pavilion Office Building, Montpelier). Bring a brown bag lunch, beverages and dessert will be provided.

Felicia announced that this Friday, March 15th is the Ninth Annual Race, Gender and Sexuality Conference at UVM in the Davis Center. Events start at 2 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 12:34 p.m.